



A newsletter for the employees of FEMA

Vol. 3 No. 5 Sept./Oct. 2000

Lights, camera, action FEMA's broadcast studio reshaped to improve agency's media message

The FEMA broadcast studio may not get the audience of a CNN and may not be as glitzy as the stage for Dateline, but it's a forum for vital disaster information in times of crisis and it projects the agency message across the nation.

And it was in desperate need of makeover, according to Matt Furman, director of FEMA's Office of Public Affairs.

"The old studio was crowded, poorly lit and inadequate," he said. "An agency as public as FEMA deserves better facilities."

Located off the EST on the mezzanine of FEMA headquarters, the broadcast studio is a mere 15 by 30 feet, with a glass window that allows the



Photo by Lauren Hobart

Don Jacks, broadcast specialist, moves a camera during the renovation of the agency's TV studio.

EST to serve as the backdrop for press conferences and other productions. Three large cameras lined the back of the studio, with one corner used as a working office and another corner used as a "set" with chairs and a bookcase. An alcove housed the technical equipment and operators, putting them within microphone reach of those actually on camera. And dozens of old

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*Impact is an employee newsletter
published by the
Office of Public Affairs*

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Director's Message

The Agency's Multimedia History Project, first introduced to the agency last February during the Director's Awards Ceremony, is up and running.

In addition to displaying information on the FEMA web site, the Multimedia History Project will place permanent records in the Clinton Presidential Library and create CD-ROMs which will be a "snapshot" of the agency's submission to the library.

The final project will include historically noteworthy material from each of FEMA's directorates, staff offices and regions. It will include records, photos, video, and audio, as well as oral histories.

The History Project is intended to tell the story of FEMA's accomplishments, milestones, lessons learned, and disaster policy implementa-

tions. This historical record will consist of three themes:

- 1) key disasters and emergency activities;
- 2) agency reinvention; and,
- 3) agency leadership.

Each theme will chart FEMA's ongoing reinvention from the early directives to the maturing disaster resistant communities and partnerships through Project Impact.

We have also invited employees to share their "favorite" FEMA stories, memories, recollections or

personal impressions.

The history project is a very important endeavor. With everyone's cooperation throughout the agency we can make it a success.

James L. Witt

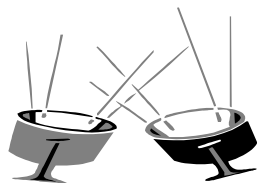
"The History Project is intended to tell the story of FEMA's accomplishments, milestones, lessons learned."

Studio cont.

videos lined the walls.

The studio is used most often during active hurricanes, with Director James Lee Witt and other key FEMA officials giving briefings to media who crowd into the small room and to media outlets that pick up the broadcast by satellite. The studio is also used to tape public service announcements, portions of EENET and video for the web site or other uses.

As part of the \$70,000 renovation, the working office was removed, as was the outdated "set." The stacks of old videos were stored else-



where. The three bulky cameras were moved out of the way of flow of traffic and a ceiling-mounted, broadcast-quality camera that doesn't take up floor space is being installed. It will be used for most broadcasts.

The ceiling, quite low by studio standards, has been raised eight inches and new lighting was installed to improve the appearance of those on camera. The off-camera technical equipment and operation area has been enclosed to reduce the sound interference when a production

is being taped. Carpeting will also cover the tile, to further improve the sound quality.

The studio renovation is timed to be complete in time for the first hurricane of the season.

"We'll be able to produce pool-quality footage and free up space for more camera crews. The more professional our operation, the more likely the media is to cover our events," said Furman. "We have the world's media here. We want there to be little difference between the quality of doing an interview in their studios or here. We needed to have the same quality." ▲

Pointer Ridge Elementary serves as pilot for disaster education

by Barbara Yagerman

A year-long first in the nation disaster education pilot program culminated with an assembly and award ceremony June 8 at Pointer Ridge Elementary School Associate Director for Preparedness, Training and Exercises Kay C. Goss recognizing students and teachers for their outstanding achievements.

"Pointer Ridge Elementary School is the only school in the entire nation to conduct a full-fledged disaster preparedness education pilot program for all grades," Ms. Goss told the students. "We will use the lessons learned at Pointer Ridge to develop a nationwide disaster education curriculum for all grades."

Goss presented certificates of recognition to School Principal Rebecca Weeks and several teachers who participated in a steering committee through the past year reviewing, testing and implementing a wide variety of disaster education programs.

"Never forget how important it is to be prepared," Cliff Brown of FEMA told the children. "You will be surprised at how much you can teach your parents."

Goss told the children about all the things they can do to help make sure their families are prepared for any type of disaster that could occur.

"There are a whole lot of

things you can do," she said. "Talk with your parents, your teachers and your neighbors about what would happen if disaster strikes. Share your thoughts. The more knowledge you have about disasters, the better prepared you will be to become a *Disaster Action Kid*."

Goss encouraged the youngsters to consider a career in emergency management.

"We now have college degree programs in emergency management in all 50 states," she said. "It is a fun job where you can spend your whole life helping other people."

Bowie Councilman William Aleshire, who initiated the pilot effort, joined Ms. Goss and other officials for the assembly.

"As an elected official it is my job to make sure your community is safe," he told the children. "That is why I wanted you to learn as much as possible about disaster preparedness."

"We will use the lessons learned at Pointer Ridge to develop a nationwide disaster curriculum."



Cliff Brown, from FEMA's Preparedness and Exercises Directorate, helps students distribute FEMA publications.



One Pointer Ridge student shows off her certificate of achievement.

Aleshire encouraged students to visit the FEMA for Kids website rather than playing games on their home computers. Also joining Goss and Aleshire for the event were FEMA Region III Director Rita Calvan and David A. Jacobs, director of the Prince George's County Office of Emergency Services.▲

Barbara Yagerman is with the Preparedness and Exercises Directorate

Coastal erosion report paints bleak picture for U.S. beaches

A study released in late June by FEMA paints a dismal picture for coastal property. According to the study, about 25 percent of homes and other structures within 500 feet of the U.S. coastline and the shorelines of the Great Lakes will feel the effects of erosion within the next 60 years.

"The findings are sobering. If coastal development continues unabated and if sea levels rise as some scientists are predicting, the impact will be even worse," said Director James Lee Witt.

Especially hard hit will be areas along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastlines, which are expected to account for 60 percent of nationwide losses. Costs to homeowners will average more than a half billion dollars per year, and additional development in high erosion areas will lead to higher losses.

The study was conducted for FEMA by the Heinz Center for Science, Economics and Environment and the results were presented to a packed news conference held in Washington, D.C. All major networks and newspapers in most major markets covered the announcement.

According to the study, the nation's highest average erosion rates - up to six feet or more per year - occur along the Gulf of Mexico. The average erosion rate on the Atlantic coast is about two to three feet per year. However, actual erosion rates can vary widely from one location to another and from one year to another. A hurricane or other major storm can cause the coast to erode 100 feet or more in a single day.

The study came about as a result of the ongoing debate over how to manage coastal erosion and whether or not, or how, to use federal programs such as the National Flood Insurance Program to address the problem. In 1994, Congress asked FEMA to submit a report evaluating the economic impact of erosion.

"This report clearly lays out the hard choices facing the Congress and this nation," Witt said.



Beach homes, such as this one, face an uncertain future, according to a new report that says 25 percent of homes within 500 feet of U.S. coastlines are in danger from erosion.

"It is now time to renew the public dialogue about how we can lower the risks to life and property and reduce the costs from the inevitable consequences of coastal erosion."

Some of the report's major findings include:

- Property owners within the first few hundred feet of the nation's coasts face as large a damage risk from erosion as they do from flooding.

- Only about half of the homeowners in high erosion areas on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts currently hold flood insurance policies.

Some of the report's policy options recommend FEMA should:

- Prepare and disseminate maps showing areas subject to erosion.

- Create Coastal High Hazard Zones that include both flood and erosion risks.

- Impose a mandatory surcharge for erosion on flood insurance in Coastal High Hazard Zones.

- Combine erosion surcharges with regulatory measures such as set-backs to reduce damages.▲

Atlantic hurricane season gets off to slow start in June, July

Weather experts say lack of storms a fairly typical pattern

June, the first month of 2000 hurricane season, slipped by without a named tropical storm or hurricane forming in the Atlantic Basin. Unusual? Not according to the weather experts.

Statistically, few tropical storms and hurricanes have developed in the Atlantic before July. Of the 938 tropical storm events on record from 1886 to 1997, only 59 happened during June. Based on this data, the National Weather Service calculates that on average such storms occur in June once every other year.

June tropical storms in the Atlantic have formed in three of the past five years.

They included Arlene on June 12, 1999, Arthur on June 17, 1996, and Allison on June 2, 1995. Only Allison strengthened to hurricane force, the first spawned in the Atlantic Basin during

June since Hurricane Bonnie in 1986.

With the exception of 1999, July has played host to tropical storms in each of the past five years. In all, 11 such storms developed during the period, the last of which was Tropical Storm Alex in 1998. Five of the storms turned into

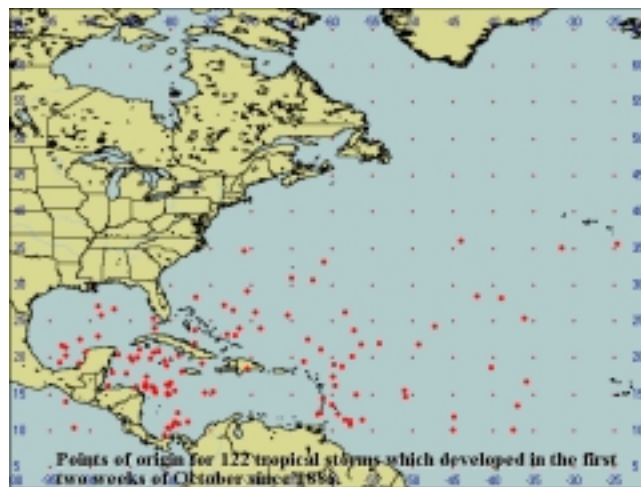
hurricanes, including Bill and Danny in 1997; Bertha and Caesar in 1996; and Erin in 1995.

Interestingly, the last June tropical storm to be declared for federal disaster aid occurred in 1989 and also bore the name Allison. The storm, which made landfall on the Gulf Coast, caused an estimated \$500 million in damage and resulted in

major disasters being declared for Louisiana and Texas.

Hurricane Agnes, striking the East Coast in 1972, stands out as the only other June Atlantic storm on record that warranted federal assistance. Major disaster declarations were issued for six states—Maryland, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia—as a result of Agnes, which caused an estimated \$2.1 billion in damage at the time and ranks as one the most costly hurricanes of the last century,

While the frequency of tropical storms increases in July, the most active part of the Atlantic hurricane season runs between August 1 and October 31. According to the historical record, 740 tropical events have taken place during this period, with the most occurring in the peak month of September. ▲



Tropical Storm Formation in the Atlantic 1886-1997

Month, Number of Storms

May	14
June	59
July	76
August	229
September	316
October	195
November	44
December	5

Access for all

Changes to FEMA web site helps disabled users

Since the FEMA web site debuted in 1992, it has grown to 20,000 pages, with 11 million hits per month and a reputation for being a vital source of information. Despite the success, improvements were needed.

"We need to make sure that the information on our website is accessible to all members of our audience, including those with disabilities," said Leslie Weiner-Leandro, chair of the agency's Internet working group.

FEMA, along with all other federal agencies, is working to make its web site accessible to those who are visually impaired, hearing impaired or who have limited mobility and difficulty using a mouse to get information. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act mandates the changes.

The General Services

Administration, the lead-implementing agency for Section 508, set a target of July 26th for initial compliance with this regulation. By this date, the top 20 most visited pages of each federal agency's principal web site must be accessible to persons with disabilities.

"We are proud to report that FEMA has readily met the July 26th deadline and that fema.gov is compliant with Section 508," said Weiner-Leandro.

With specially designed screen reader software, the visually impaired can "view" text information on the Internet. By inserting ALT tag descriptions and including alternate text links for all graphics, the visually impaired



can have a similar experience as our sighted users when accessing FEMA.gov.

Additional changes such as, migrating all server-side image maps to client-side image

maps, using header tags on all tables, and providing descriptive links enhances accessibility for visually impaired users.

FEMA can also minimize obstacles for those with hearing disabilities by including text versions of audio files. Individuals with limited mobility can use the web site more easily with simple accommodations, such as limiting scrolling and mouse clicks. ▲

"We need to make the information accessible to all members of our audience."

New director appointed to Region VII

Beth A. Freeman, the disaster services coordinator for Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, has been appointed director of Region VII.

"Ms. Freeman brings considerable disaster experience to this position and we are pleased to have her join our team," said FEMA Director James L. Witt. "In addition to working with FEMA in the past, Ms. Freeman has worked with the American Red Cross and the U.S. Small Business Administration - two important partners to FEMA's disaster response activities."

Freeman has served as regional director for Senator Harkin since 1991. In addition to her role as the disaster services coordinator, Freeman

also provided oversight to three of the Senator's offices in eastern Iowa. Before joining the Senator's staff, Freeman was the executive programs coordinator for the Pacific Asian Management Institute, University of Hawaii.

Previously, Freeman served on the Board of Directors for the Grant Wood Chapter of the American Red Cross and on the National Advisory Council to the Small Business Administration, and was chair of the Cedar Rapids Recreation Commission, a citizen's advisory board.

Freeman holds a Master in Business Administration from the University of Hawaii and a Bachelor of Arts from Drake University. ▲



FEMA Profile: Lynn Canton

A self-described “child of the ‘60s,” Lynn Canton, FEMA’s newly appointed Executive Director, always knew she wanted a career in public service. She just wasn’t sure where that career would take her.

“I didn’t know what job, but I knew public service would be the career,” she said.

And so it has been.

She started out in political campaigns and youth and government positions, and later was a member of the New York State Board of Parole. Later still, she served as executive director of the Division of Minority and Women’s Business Development for the Department of Economic Development for New York

have seemed a strange twist in her career path, it made sense to Canton.

“It’s the role of the government to assist people in times of crisis and disaster. This is very satisfying work,” she said.

But her timing couldn’t have been worse. She arrived just days before the 1996 government shutdown and ended up managing the office virtually alone.

“I really prayed there wouldn’t be a disaster during that time,” she said.

There wasn’t, though within weeks, a flooding disaster was declared. And in her four years, she would respond to 30 presidential disasters costing more

than \$2.5 billion in federal relief, including hurricanes Floyd and Georges. Initially, she found the intensity of the disaster work and the team spirit of the employees memorable.

“Everyone just pulled together brilliantly to get it done,” she said. “That em-



Lynn Canton

ployee spirit was gratifying to me as a new person in the business.”

The request to come to Washington D.C. in a new position came as a surprise, she said, but she didn’t hesitate to take the job.

“I thought it would be a challenge. It’s not every day that you get an opportunity like this,” she said. “With my past career in public service, coming to D.C. was a real treat.”

In her new position since June, Canton is now responsible for FEMA internal personnel and management, strategic planning, diversity issues, labor

“Everyone just pulled together brilliantly to get it done. That employee spirit was gratifying to me as a new person.”

state. While in that post, she served as chair of the New York State Affirmative Action Advisory Council and on the Task Force on the Status of Women.

From there, she took the position of Regional Director for FEMA’s New York City-based Region II. While it may

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partnership and employee development. One of her first objectives is to develop the FEMA management council, a process for senior managers to thoroughly discuss major issues, providing detailed analysis and input before it goes to Director James Lee Witt.

The challenges are juggling long-term goals with the “gazillion little things” that come up every day, she said, and strategic planning in a crisis environment.

“A million things may come up on a daily basis but I also want to put focus in a corporate way on the big picture issues,” Canton said.

Canton is also juggling two residences, with her home in upstate New York and an apartment in Washington, D.C. Just as she did when she worked in New York City, she goes home each weekend to a small town of 30,000 with no sidewalks and lots of trees.

This separation from the big city and her past work with state and local governments gives her an important perspective, she said, one that is valuable in her new position.

“Sometimes it’s easy to forget that all disasters are local,” she said. “I carry that because I’ve been there and it’s a good perspective to have when facing headquarters policy issues.” ▲

“A million things may come up on a daily basis, but I also want to focus on the big picture issues.”

Virtual reality used by fire officials to improve arson investigations

Fire investigators in Hawaii are praising a virtual reality program that allows fire investigators to interact by computer with fire scenes and witnesses. Investigators say the program allows them to see an entire fire scene, including behind doors and under furniture.

The program combines virtual reality technology with high-resolution images, and allows investigators to take snapshots, request a canine unit, gather evidence and write a report.

FEMA’s U.S. Fire Administration, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the National Fire Protection Association and the American Re-Insurance Company jointly developed the program.

Honolulu investigators say while it isn’t better than going to an actual fire scene, it offers a realistic view and hopefully can help improve chances of solving arson crimes. There were 263 reported arson cases last year in that city, and just 10 were solved.

USFA’s Andy Giglio, a fire prevention specialist based at the NETC campus in Emmitsburg, was the program’s project officer. The program, called “InterFire VR” is a CD-ROM. It’s a revolutionary new fire investigation program that encourages a team approach to fire investigation, Giglio said.

The program recently received high praise from the Training Officers Conference, which recognized it with their Distinguished Service Award for Learning Technology. ▲



OPM expands family care leave

The Office of Personnel Management has issued final regulations, effective June 20, 2000, which expand the use of sick leave for family care purposes. Previously, regulations only allowed employees to use up to 13 days of their accrued sick leave each year to care for an ill family members and/or to attend the funeral of

a family member. However, under the final regulations, a full-time employee may use a total of up to 12 weeks of accrued sick leave each year to care for a family member with a *serious health condition*. For details, see the Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM) Alert No. 00-03 or visit ohrm.fema.gov. ▲